



**LAND CONCERN**  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

**MEMORANDUM**

May 2010

**To:** Antonio Parkway File      **From:** Michael J. Sweeney, Principal

**Subject:** Visual Impact Assessment Memo

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**Project Description**

This memo summarizes the Visual Impact Assessment checklist and serves to detail the potential aesthetic impacts of the proposed widening of an approximate 1.4-mile segment of Antonio Parkway within unincorporated Orange County, California. The Project limits begin at approximately 2,000 feet south of the intersection at Covenant Hills Drive (the southern boundary of the Ladera Ranch Planned Community) and extend approximately 7,900 feet (1.4 miles) south. This would extend the improvements approximately 900 feet south of the intersection with State Route 74 (SR-74), which is known locally as Ortega Highway. Extending the improvements through the intersection is required to facilitate traffic operations and provide for a safe transition to the existing lane configuration on La Pata Avenue. The improvements would utilize the existing roadway centerline, profile, and standard super-elevation rates.

The typical proposed roadway width would be 102 feet between curbs and a total of 120 feet of roadway right-of-way. This widening would allow for 3 lanes of traffic in each direction (13-foot, 12-foot, and 11-foot lanes) and a 14-foot-wide raised median. Additionally, 8-foot-wide bikeway/shoulders and 6-foot-wide curb-adjacent or 5-foot-wide meandering sidewalks would be provided on both sides of the street. Parkways would vary between 11 and 25 feet in width.

A new 40.25-foot-wide bridge would be constructed over San Juan Creek. The new bridge, combined with the existing bridge, would provide sufficient width to allow for 3 southbound lanes, 1 southbound left-turn lane, a 4-foot-wide raised median, and 3 northbound lanes. There would be 8-foot shoulders and 5-foot sidewalks on both sides of the roadway. The design would be a cast-in-place, pre-stressed, continuous concrete box girder that would match the existing bridge superstructure. The proposed bridge span configuration would match the existing bridge spans and would be a total of 776 feet long.

**Project Setting**

Antonio Parkway is located approximately 2.5 miles east of Interstate 5 (I-5) and provides the only direct route between the communities of Ladera Ranch, Mission Viejo, and Rancho Santa Margarita. At SR-74, the name of the roadway changes to La Pata Avenue, which extends to the south and currently terminates at the Prima Deshecha Landfill. The Orange County Master

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Plan of Arterial Highways depicts La Pata Avenue as continuing through the landfill to Avenida Pico in the City of San Clemente.

Antonio Parkway has been constructed to full standard to the southern boundary of the Ladera Ranch Planned Community; it is a four-lane roadway from the Ladera Ranch Planned Community's southern boundary to SR-74. The bridge across San Juan Creek was built as part of the initial phase of improvements associated with the Ladera Ranch Planned Community and is 68 feet wide. No lighting or sidewalks have been provided south of the Ladera Ranch Planned Community, as these would be implemented as part of ultimate improvements. Though only interim improvements were constructed within the study area, the ultimate right-of-way was graded from the southern boundary of Ladera Ranch to the San Juan Creek Bridge with the initial phase of construction in 1998. In 2007, the area was cleared of vegetation, including the area beneath the bridge. As a result, the vegetation on site is limited to regrowth.

Key features within and adjacent to the project limits include the following:

- San Juan Creek, located north of SR-74, is a major drainage basin that flows in an east-west direction through the project site. The Creek is a major drainage that discharges into the Pacific Ocean in the vicinity of the City of Dana Point.
- SR-74 is the southern limit of the project. SR-74 connects Riverside and Orange Counties, traversing the Cleveland National Forest. Improvements are currently being constructed to widen SR-74 to four lanes from the County of Orange/City of San Juan Capistrano boundary to approximately 1,900 feet east of Antonio Parkway. This is a distance of approximately one mile.
- Ladera Ranch is a planned community located immediately north of the project site. This project is mostly built out and provides for a mix of residential and commercial uses.
- Rancho Mission Viejo owns the land adjacent to the project. Their headquarters is located approximately 1/3 mile west of the project limits.
- The Rancho Mission Viejo Riding Park at San Juan Capistrano is a private equestrian sports center located south of project limits at the SR-74/La Pata Avenue Intersection.
- The City of San Juan Capistrano is located approximately one mile to the west of the project limits.

### **Visual Assessment**

Visual impacts are relative to the visual environment in which they occur. Visual impacts can extend beyond the physical areas that result in disturbance. The regional landscape establishes the general visual environment. Specific impacts are determined by defining the visual quality of the landscape units and the project viewshed. Visual quality and the viewshed are interrelated elements that occupy the same three-dimensional space, each space affecting the adjacent space.

Identification of the viewers and the aspects of the visual environment to which they are likely to respond are necessary to understand and predict viewer response to proposed projects. The response to the visual environment determines the viewer exposure and is based on the different activities of the viewer groups, their sensitivity to the visual elements, and the duration of their view. Photographs from various vantage points along the alignment are provided at the end of this memorandum.

### *Visual Quality*

Overall the viewshed quality is high because the surrounding area is in a natural state. However, in the immediate vicinity of the Antonio Parkway/SR-74 intersection, the viewshed quality is moderate. The long-range views are still of natural hillsides but short-range views have been disturbed both from the recent construction activities on SR-74 and from past agricultural activities. The northwestern and southeastern quadrants of this intersection were previously leased by commercial nurseries. The leases expired and were not renewed. Therefore, the area is highly disturbed with only scrubby weeds on site. Pads for the container plants have also been graded.

Project limits begin at approximately 2,000 feet south of the intersection at Covenant Hills Drive (the southern boundary of the Ladera Ranch Planned Community). The most southern row of homes in Covenant Hills would have direct views of the project site. Though the roadway is clearly visible from the first row of homes, it is not a primary resource in the viewshed. These homes are set on a hill. Due to elevation differences of homes with the surrounding area, the homes have expansive views of the nearby hills. The visual quality from this location would be high and the visual sensitivity would also be high because views would be an important asset for these homes.

The orientation of the Rancho Mission Viejo Riding Park at San Juan Capistrano is inward toward the polo/exhibition fields. There are locations within the Riding Park with views northward toward Antonio Parkway. There is an approximate 300-foot elevation rise from the polo/exhibition fields to the northern limits of the proposed project. The overall visual quality from the Riding Park is moderately high. The long-range vistas are of natural hillsides. The short range views are of SR-74 to the north.

Both Antonio Parkway and SR-74 are designated on the County of Orange *Scenic Highway Plan* as Landscape Corridors. North of the project site, Antonio Parkway has been developed consistent with the County's Scenic Highway Implementation Planning Guidelines. However, for the project-segment of Antonio Parkway, landscape features have not been incorporated because only interim improvements have been implemented. Though eligible, SR-74 has not been designated as a State Scenic Highway.

### *Modification to Visual Character*

The proposed project would not introduce any major new visual elements into the project area; rather it would widen the existing roadway. The initial phase of the project was constructed in 1998. This involved the construction of the existing four-lane roadway and the grading for the ultimate facility south to the bridge over San Juan Creek. The project would result in an incremental increase in the paved area and bridge width within the project area. No major landform alteration would be required. As a result, the project would not constitute a substantial change to the visual character of the area.

The design of the new bridge over San Juan Creek would complement the existing bridge. This would not substantially change the existing mid-range or long-range viewshed from the homes in Covenant Hills. The closest residential unit is more than 600 feet away from the closest edge of Antonio Parkway. There is a minimum elevation difference of 90 feet from the highest point on the roadway to the lowest residential unit. The maximum elevation difference is 415 feet from the lowest point of the roadway to the lowest residential unit. Once completed, the new bridge would visual appear as a widening of the existing bridge rather than a separate structure.



The project would include design elements already present as part of the existing roadways. As previously indicated, the preliminary grading for the Antonio Parkway widening was completed previously south to the San Juan Creek Bridge, as part of the initial phase of the roadway construction. A total of 105,000 cubic yards of grading would be required. The locations requiring the greatest amount of earthwork would be the construction of the bridge embankment and the area immediately north of the bridge. Overall, the proposed project would result in a modest level of change in the physical characteristics due to landform alteration.

There would be a retaining wall constructed along the western side of La Pata Avenue, adjacent to the Rancho Mission Viejo Riding Park at San Juan Capistrano. The wall would be visible for approximately 140 linear feet. The retaining wall would be visually consistent with the existing retaining wall at the base of the slope (within the park). However, it would not be as prominent because the exposed face of the existing wall is approximately eight to ten feet tall, whereas only four to five feet of the proposed wall would be visible.

There currently is no landscaping (median or on the parkway) that would be removed during construction. With the development to ultimate configuration, the project would incorporate the required design and landscape features in compliance with the Orange County *Scenic Highway Plan*. This would allow Antonio Parkway to further complement the visual character of the adjacent community.

Some vegetation in San Juan Creek would be displaced for construction of the columns for the bridge improvements. The regulatory permits issued for this project by the Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board require that the area be revegetated with native plant material upon completion of construction; therefore, the loss of vegetation would be for a short duration. Based on the permit performance standards, the loss would be for less than five years.

#### *Viewer Groups*

The most sensitive viewer group would be the southernmost row of residential units in Ladera Ranch's Covenant Hills development. Views from the residential lots would not undergo a substantial change. Mid-range views would experience a minor modification as Antonio Parkway would be widened. The project would not result in substantial landform modification. The amount of hard surface (i.e., pavement) would increase. The location of the previous grading is visible from these homes (see Figure 2, Photograph A). This area would be paved. However, this area does not have landscaping or other enhancements currently. With the completion of the Antonio Parkway project, landscaping would be implemented consistent with the County of Orange Landscape Corridor requirements. This would minimize the visual effect of the roadway widening. In addition, the focus of the residents' viewshed would continue to be on the long-range views of the natural hillsides.

A portion of the homes would have direct views of the bridge over San Juan Creek (see Figure 2, Photograph B). These residents would have views of the loss of vegetation under the bridge. However, this would be a small percentage of the creek area and would be for a short duration. Given the water in the creek, the vegetation would be restored relatively quickly. As previously mentioned, the area was mowed in 2007 and regrowth is visible in Figure 2, Photograph B, which were taken in summer 2009.

The second set of viewer groups are the users of the Rancho Mission Viejo Riding Park at San Juan Capistrano. Views from the Riding Park would see a wider roadway extending up the hill, which is consistent with the roadway cross-section at the top of the hill. The introduction of landscaping consistent with the Orange County Landscape Corridor requirements would

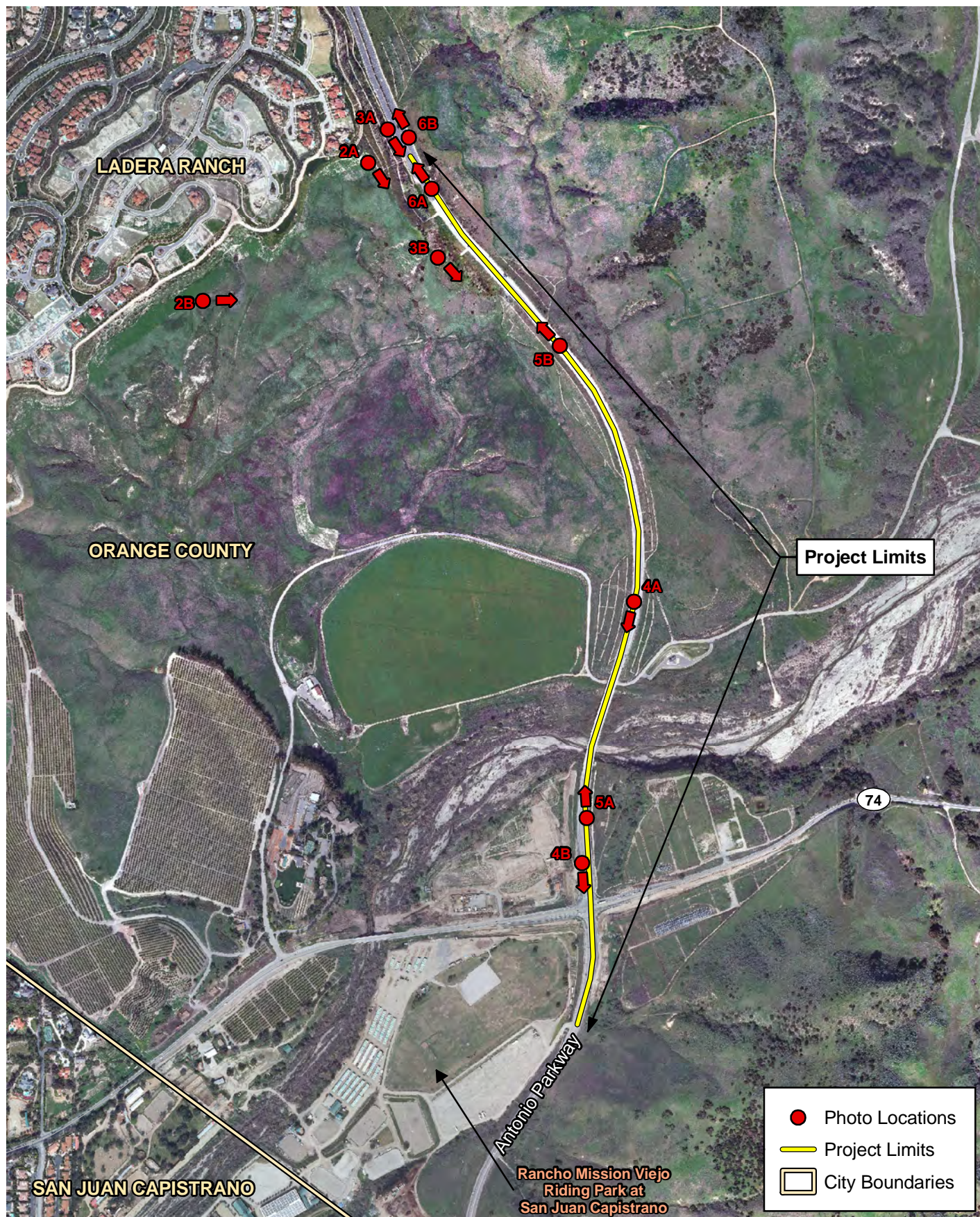
minimize the impacts associated with the wider roadway cross-section. Long-range views from the Riding Park would not be modified. The widening of Antonio Parkway would not modify the overall visual character of the park or the setting. Additionally, given the uses at the park, the view orientation would be internal to the park.

The third viewer group is the motorist. By nature, the duration of their exposure to the viewshed is short. Since this group is transient, the sensitivity to change in the viewshed is usually low to moderate. The project would not introduce new elements that would substantially change the viewshed. The project would result in more hardscape associated with the increased amount of paving and wider bridge structure. This would be softened with the introduction of landscaping. However, the most notable portion of the viewshed would continue to be the long-range views. This is especially applicable to drivers traveling south of Antonio Parkway where the elevation allows scenic vistas of the hillsides. The roadway widening would not alter these views.





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## Photo Index Map

Antonio Parkway Widening



1,000 500 0 1,000 Feet

Figure 1





A. View from Covenant Hills looking southeasterly toward San Juan Creek.



B. View from Covenant Hills looking toward ultimate grading line.

## Site Photos

*Antonio Parkway Widening Project*



Figure 2



A. Northern terminus of project looking south.



B. View of motorist heading southbound on Antonio Parkway.

## Site Photos

*Antonio Parkway Widening Project*



Figure 3





A. View of motorist heading southbound on Antonio Parkway.



B. View of motorist heading southbound approaching the Antonio Parkway/State Route 74 intersection.

## Site Photos

*Antonio Parkway Widening Project*



Figure 4



A. Motorist view of the San Juan Creek Bridge from northbound Antonio Parkway.



B. View of motorist heading northbound on Antonio Parkway.

## Site Photos

## Figure 5

*Antonio Parkway Widening Project*







A. View of project northern terminus and the Covenant Hills development.



B. Northern terminus of project looking north.

## Site Photos

## Figure 6

*Antonio Parkway Widening Project*

